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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE PASS AID/ANE, HHS FOR OGHA - STEIGER  
STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND IO/IHA  
PHNOM PENH FOR AID - CAROL JENKINS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEW HEALTH MINISTER PROGRESSIVE ON VCT

1. (U) This is an action request for EAP/BCLTV. Please see paragraph 7.

2. (SBU) Summary: The COM had a productive courtesy call on the new Health Minister, pressing him on expanded VCT, discussing an expected private health care law, and presenting the case for visits to Burma by Orbis and Operation Smile. The Minister said he looked forward to future U.S.-Burma dialogue on VCT and humanitarian aid issues, and that he would try to be available when the USG delegation led by OES DAS Chow comes to Rangoon at the end of March. End summary.

#### Voluntary Counseling and Testing Progress Possible

3. (SBU) The Chief of Mission paid a courtesy call on the new Health Minister, Dr. Kyaw Myint, on February 26. From the outset of the meeting, it was clear the new Minister has taken a far more positive position on INGO participation in voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), than had his predecessor. Responding to the COM's questions, the Minister said that the GOB would be willing to allow INGOs to provide VCT services for at-risk communities (including TB patients).

However, he agreed that, the devil was in the details. He would not elaborate on what the outstanding details were, or how the GOB currently stood on them, but he did urge the U.S. government to send out someone to work out these details with the Ministry. Along these lines, the Minister was curious why the CDC visit had been canceled, and said he looked forward to its return.

#### Private Healthcare Soon to Be Legalized

4. (SBU) When asked about the status of a long-awaited law legalizing private health care, the Minister turned to his deputies to respond. They were evasive, saying only that the draft was in with the Attorney General's office, and that when it emerged it should be ready for promulgation. The law will allow provision of health care by properly licensed and supervised private clinics and pharmacies (currently private clinics operate without official sanction). The Minister's staff was vague on the matter of foreign participation in the new private health care sector. However, the message seemed clear that foreigners would not be allowed to participate unless they were physicians licensed by the Myanmar Medical Association.

#### Orbis, Operation Smile Welcome

5. (U) The COM queried the Minister on the possibility of U.S.-based non-profits Orbis and Operation Smile coming to Burma. The Minister replied that Orbis was "an old friend" and could come anytime (Note: Orbis was in Burma most recently in 2000). He mentioned that there was already significant international assistance for cleft palate and facial reconstructive surgery, and that local doctors were also performing these operations for the poorest children. However, he said that Operation Smile should come to discuss with the MOH a possible visit to Burma. The COM gave the Minister some background information on Operation Smile and Orbis and told him we would advise these organizations of his response.

#### Looking for Help

6. (SBU) The Minister volunteered the fact that Burma and the GOB desperately need additional international assistance and funding to effectively tackle the country's health-related priorities. He said the small amount of such funding and advice to date have been major obstacles to success. The Minister urged the United States to become more engaged, by exchanging proposals for areas of possible cooperation. The COM responded that we expected a visit at the end of March of a USG delegation, led by OES DAS Chow, looking to discuss matters of health and humanitarian assistance. The Minister responded that he would try to find time on his schedule to meet with the delegation.

#### Action Request

17. (SBU) For EAP/BCLTV: Please contact Operation Smile and Orbis to relay the Minister's message. Operation Smile, if interested in coming to Burma, should consider sending a representative to lay the groundwork with key MOH officials. Martinez